

Speech by John A. Hannah
President, Michigan State University
Ohio State University Commencement
December 14, 1968

For release: at 9:45 a.m.
Saturday, Dec. 14, 1968

"WE WILL WANT WHAT WE WASTE"

President Fawcett, members of the Board of Regents, members of the faculty, members of the graduating class and their families and guests, ladies and gentlemen:

You have honored me highly in inviting me to participate in your commencement exercises. It is a privilege for me to begin by extending the greetings of Michigan State University to all of you on this happy occasion.

Our two universities have been friends and allies since their beginning. For about three hours on a Saturday afternoon in the fall of most years that relationship may appear to become somewhat strained and even rather combative. In retrospect, for this past fall about all I can say is that we at Michigan State are glad that our football team played yours on the first Saturday of November rather than on the fourth Saturday of November. We have now closed ranks with you and will cheer loudly for your team as the Big Ten champions they deserve to be on that first rosy afternoon of 1969.

I have been visiting this campus from time to time for many years, and it is a pleasure to be back again and to see and learn even more about the useful and effective programs that Ohio State offers to the people of this state, to the nation, and to the world.

All citizens of Ohio should be increasingly proud of this impressive and ever-improving University. It has an illustrious history. Its present accomplishments are excellent. Its long-range planning for its future promises even greater returns on the investment Ohio is making in higher education in general, and in Ohio State University in particular.

As you might guess, I have participated in many commencement exercises as a listener or as a participant. From those experiences, I have come to two general conclusions about commencement speeches and speakers that I suspect apply in Columbus, Ohio, as well as in East Lansing, Michigan, and elsewhere.

The first is that the real center of attention at any commencement should be the graduating class, and the speaker should remember that he is only a ceremonial adjunct who need not be too profound in his remarks because no one will remember them, anyway.

The second is that the commencement speaker who really understands his role will be mercifully brief, for reasons so obvious they need no explaining.

You have my promise that I shall heed my own admonitions faithfully.

Today is a time to look ahead, but it also is a time for memories, too. Memories of formal courses and informal midnight discussions, memories of exciting professors and some not quite so stimulating, memories of classes, of the library, of concerts, of the beauty of spring, of the sight of the Twin Towers at night, memories of last year's Cinderella basketball team, of the thrills of this fall's Michigan football game, memories of all that took place that was stimulating, or fun, or aggravating, or discouraging.

Memories, arranged by each, according to the experiences of each.

Mothers and fathers have memories, too; ~~They~~ They go back to when today's man or woman was a small boy or girl, and they include the parents' dreams then, and how they have been realized--or not realized. Memories of pride and faith in son or daughter, of hopes and more dreams for tomorrow.

Parent and student alike asked much of this University, and your confidence was well placed. Ohio State serves tens of thousands in the State of Ohio, and beyond, in providing opportunities for on-campus education through research, through a great variety of public services. It is well equipped to perform this service.

Ohio State University has played an important role in at least three categories of higher education.

First, it is among that very large number of publicly or tax-supported institutions. This means that a substantial share of its annual operating budget comes from the tax payments of the citizens of Ohio. The actual cost of higher education is always greater than any student pays at any college or university. At the private universities, the endowment income, and

income, and the generous gifts by private and corporate donors pays the difference between the student payments and the actual costs. At the tax-supported universities, the difference between actual cost and what the student pays is made up by the tax dollars ^{paid} ~~contributed~~ not only by corporations and the well-to-do, but by all citizens, rich and poor alike, including some ^{tax payments} ~~contribution~~ from the least advantaged of our people.

Education, freely available to the maximum any student can absorb and use, is sometimes referred to as the secret weapon of the United States. No other nation in the world has done so much in making maximum education so widely available to so many of its people. Of the more than seven million students enrolled in all colleges and universities in our country this year, seven out of every ten attend tax-supported institutions.

Second, Ohio State is the land-grant university for the State of Ohio. Land-grant colleges were established by the federal congress and signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln back in 1862. For 106 years, their objective has been to provide liberal and practical higher education for the sons and daughters of all Americans. This we now take for granted, but a century ago such an approach was a radical departure. Before the advent of the land-grant colleges, higher education in this country was for the most part

the most part limited to the sons and daughters of the rich and the favored few, and the heavy emphasis was on theology, medicine, law, and pedagogy for the training of preachers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and a kind of liberal education designed for the elite to permit them to live lives of genteel idleness. What a difference today!

Today, of all students in all of our four-year colleges and universities, about two-thirds of them attend the land-grant and state universities. As more students insist on more college places, much of the enrollment growth has fallen upon the large public universities, Ohio State included.

Third, your University is a member of the CIC universities (Committee on Institutional Cooperation) which includes the Big Ten universities and the University of Chicago. The eleven institutions in this Council work together in many ways, more of them having to do with academics than with athletics. They enroll far more than their share of the nation's college students and award far more than their share of the nation's college degrees, and an even larger share of the nation's graduate degrees.

The enrollment of the average college in the United States is about 3,000; the average enrollment at a Big 10 university is above 30,000, and your Ohio State University is considerably larger than that and is one of the largest universities in the country.

The challenge to Ohio State and to Michigan State, and to other ~~universities~~ institutions of very large enrollment, has been to turn large size into an advantage and to make large size provide more opportunity for each student. There are advantages to size, if we but know how to put them to use.

Much has happened to higher education in America and on this campus since you first enrolled as a student, and most of it has been good.

One way and another, you have used your time here for formal learning and for informal learning. I am sure that each of you have intended to do your best, as you could identify what was best at the time.

Ohio State University has done its best, too. All that was offered you here, all that was made available inside the classroom and out, was put before you so that you could make maximum use of your potential talent, so you could learn all you would learn.

Now, at Commencement time, you are about to leave Ohio State, but you will take much of Ohio State with you.

One of the most important qualities to take with you is the determination to put to use what you have learned here, to take with you into the outside world a willingness to stand up and be counted when that counting has meaning, and to take with you a dedication to do as well as you can in everything that you undertake.

I once saw a sign posted on the time clock in a manufacturing plant that I have remembered. The sign read: "We Will Want What We Waste."

Six words, all beginning with W. The 6-W statement is almost a formula. I think they are worth remembering for us as individuals and for society as a whole.

Americans do waste so much. We waste our natural resources--coal, oil, gas, clean water, clean air; we waste our money, our machines, the products of machines; we waste so much of our time--not only time for work but time for play and time that could be used for our own enjoyment or for doing things to help others.

And we waste human beings, too. The waste of our human resources is our worst waste of all, and I would hope you have decided to fashion your lives to take a stand against this waste.

We waste the chance to develop the brains and potential skills of all of our citizens. Good as our university and college system is, our elementary and secondary schools do not yet provide the kind of education that lets every American youngster learn as much as he is capable of learning. We know how to teach better than we are willing to pay for. We scrimp and we trim budgets, and the result is that sometimes in Ohio and many times in other states, we short-change our schools, which really means we are short-changing ourselves and our own children, and tomorrow's society. Amid plenty, minds starve.

There is so much that needs to be done that could be done to make the world a better place in which to live that some day we will want this education we are wasting. I hope your stand will be to help to stop this waste, whatever the cost.

We waste the abilities of far too many of the non-white persons in this nation. Just because they happen to be black, some 11 or 12 out of every 100 of our citizens are in danger of being wasted in the task of building a better America. Through no fault of their own, many who are black have never had the chance to use their brains for all they are worth, will never have the chance to show just how much they really could do to help to contribute to making our communities, our state, our country better than they are.

We will want the developed potential of these citizens we are wasting. I hope your stand will be to help solve some of the complications of this problem.

For another example, we have but to look to a wave of wastefulness that has swept the country and many campuses in recent years. Call it the "demand" wave, if you will. It has become fashionable these days not to propose or suggest, not to discuss or debate, but to demand.

Does some group have wants or desires, complaints or grievances?

Do its leaders sit down with the other party or the other side, and talk over their differences and reach a mutual understanding?

No, instead all too often they make a demand or submit a list of demands--demands that psychologically make the other side dig in the heels, demands that because of the way they are made may delay the adjustment, demands that may result in a less-satisfactory conclusion that might have resulted had the same points been presented as suggestions or requests for debate and discussion and action.

Those who make such demands seem to ignore the fact that there often is another side. There usually is another point of view. There are others whose interests deserve respect. And there just might be an idea better than that expressed in the ultimatum.

To make demands is popular right now, but the day will come when we may want the chance for the discussion we have wasted, we may want the fruits of the debate we never had, we may want the better idea that never had a chance to be heard. I hope your stand will be on the side of reason and the search for truth, reasonably arrived at.

It sounds old-fashioned and homely and over-simplified, but again I suggest that if you are to make the greatest use of your education, perhaps you will want to remember that very simple 6-W formula: "We Will Want What We Waste".

And as educated men and women, I hope you will want to apply the formula when in the future you have the chance to take a stand to help every youngster attend a school at least as good as the best one you attended. I hope you will want to apply the formula when you take the stand that insists that all human beings merit equal dignity and respect, without reference to color, or race, or religion, or where they were born, or other equally shallow and meaningless measurements. I hope you will want to remember "We Will Want What We Waste" when you live your life with reason and without placing your demands above those of all others. I hope you will want to apply the formula "We Will Want What We Waste" when you take a stand on the many issues that have meaning that will confront you throughout your lives.

In so doing, you will best serve your University, you will best serve others, and you will best serve yourself.

I believe, like you must believe, that education in all forms is to play a more, not less, important role as we as a nation turn our attention increasingly to the correction of the flaws in our social structure. Many new approaches, new gimmicks, are being tested in our mounting war against poverty and prejudice, but education is and must be at the heart of all our efforts.

The reason for its essential significance is a simple but a powerful one. The central purpose of all of our efforts is to help each individual American achieve his inherent potential, and that is the traditional purpose of education itself. Laws can erase artificial barriers of prejudice and discrimination, but the only meaningful change must come from enlightened minds. Social mobility must be based on individual ability to perform, and only education can develop that ability, no matter what an individual's capacity.

People in the ghetto understand this full well, as underprivileged people have always understood. If we could only somehow educate all of those who have been left behind, many of our social problems would disappear. Most disadvantaged people would still like to work for a decent living if they had a chance. There are still only a few who believe the rest of us owe them a living and ^{perhaps} prefer dependence upon charity rather than the independence of a job and an earned income.

Events of recent weeks and months, both at home and abroad, have demonstrated over and over again how far we are from the time when reason, not force, will arbitrate the differences between man and man, nation and nation, ideology and ideology. They illustrate, too, how difficult is the task of preserving the best of what has been handed down to us from the past, and enriching that legacy before we of this time pass our common inheritance on to those who follow us.

Inevitably, the responsibilities will fall with increasing weight upon those represented by this graduating class today--upon educated men and women who will apply their educated intelligence to the solution of the problems besetting mankind.

President Fawcett, members of the Board of Regents, citizens of Ohio, I am confident that these young men and women making up this graduating class, to whose personal development so much time and effort has been devoted, will prove themselves to be educated in the best sense of the word--willing to use what they have learned here not for their personal advantage alone, but for the good of others as well. I join with you in full confidence that they will bring great honor to themselves and to their families and to their University. They will help to lead this nation with courage and integrity.

For them, this final word of encouragement. Although our problems as Americans are great, so too are the resources we can bring to bear on them. There is much to be done, but there is much with which to do.

Congratulations to each of you for what you have already done with your life. We extend to you our best wishes for success and happiness as you go forth to meet life's sterner tests. We have every confidence that you will succeed, and make all of us proud of you and proud of your generation.

To each of you--good fortune, good luck, and Godspeed always.

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